Gratitude in Buyer-Seller Relationships
Stephanie M. Mangus, PhD, Dora E. Bock, PhD, Eli Jones, PhD, and Judith Anne Garretson Folse, PhD

Why People Like Where They Live
Robyn Driskell, PhD, Larry Lyon, PhD, and Brittany M. Fitz-Chapman, PhD

Strategic Personal Branding—And How It Pays Off
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Valuable Virality
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INSIDER: Why Women Buy
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Pareezad Zarolia, PhD and Kateri McRae, PhD

In the simplest of transactions, the exchange of goods and services between a buyer and a seller develops a relationship that is dependent on trust. The trust developed in this relationship implies that buyers are rightfully informing sellers about the goods or services being sold and that the sellers will fairly compensate buyers for their time and expertise. More broadly applied than the buyer-seller relationship, trust is an essential trait that characterizes individuals, organizations, and societies as a whole. It embodies ideas of confidence, honesty, and reliability. Therefore, in order to maximize the trust relationship in a real estate context, the real estate agent must be cognizant of the direct and indirect impressions that a potential client can acquire that can impact the buyer-seller relationship.

Direct vs. Indirect Impressions

Direct and indirect impressions can considerably influence individuals to perceive others in certain ways. People can form these impressions in a variety of ways, including through personal social interactions, as well as through knowledge that is obtained through third parties about other people (secondhand information, which could include rumors and gossip). Direct impressions come from knowledge that is acquired through interpersonal interactions that allow the perceiver to create opinions about another’s physical, emotional, and mental behavior. Indirect impressions are formed by acquiring knowledge about an individual from a third party; thus, the third party has influence over the perceiver’s impressions about an individual, regardless of whether the indirect information is accurate. Whether direct or indirect, such impressions can influence whether buyers themselves exhibit trustworthy behavior toward sellers and how trustworthy buyers perceive sellers to be. As a real estate agent, it is important to realize that not only will you develop direct and indirect impressions about your clients, but your clients will develop direct and indirect impressions about you, as well. Ideally, only our direct interactions with others would contribute to the impressions they form, allowing us to be in full control over how trustworthy others deem us. However, it is possible that indirect information also influences these judgements, even when it conflicts with direct experience. How influential is indirect information for clients’ impressions of real estate agents compared to first-hand interaction (direct) information?
Research Study

The purpose of the study conducted in “Influence of Indirect Information on Interpersonal Trust Despite Direct Information” (Zarolia 2017) was to determine how direct and indirect information influence the development of trust in social relationships. Direct information was manipulated by making partners more or less trustworthy in the trust game, and participants learned this through repeated interactions in which the partners shared (or didn’t) share back money earned in the game. Indirect information was manipulated with small stories about the targets in which the targets are engaging in trustworthy behavior (like correcting a mistake despite it benefiting them) or untrustworthy behavior (like stealing money). In addition, this study aimed to answer the question of whether direct information or indirect information, while considering what type of information was presented first or most frequently, significantly influenced interpersonal trust, over time. Through the Trust Game, which is an economic game that tracks how direct and indirect information influence social behaviors, order (whether direct information was presented before indirect information, or vice versa) and frequency (how often direct information was presented compared to indirect information) were manipulated to examine if trust was influenced by indirect information, even when given a strong disadvantage.

Analysis and Results

What was the extent to which indirect information had an influence over an individual’s perception of a target person’s trustworthy behavior? As hypothesized, each of the four studies conducted suggested a considerably robust effect of indirect impressions on subjects’ assessments of the target person despite the existence of significant direct impressions through sharing behavior during the experiment. This is especially important because in this task, the indirect information didn’t help the participants make any more money on the task—the most rational thing to do in all studies would be to ignore the indirect information entirely. Study 1 established that indirect information contributes to the impressions formed, even in the face of powerful first-hand experiences. Study 2 suggested that a single instance of indirect information given about a person’s behavior is enough to influence a perceiver’s attitude towards the target person. Study 3 found that indirect information still influenced trustworthy behavior even if given following several direct experiences with the partner. That is, indirect information does not need to be part of a first impression to alter how a perceiver trusts the target person. Finally, Study 4 replicated the findings of the first three studies by conducting the study with only one target person rather than a series of different target persons, meaning that the indirect information need not be compared to others in order to influence trustworthy behavior.

Real Estate Implications

Trust is essential to the survival of individuals, organizations, and society. Direct information, which is acquired through one-on-one social interactions, and indirect information, which is acquired through third-party communications about a target person, influence the formation of
trust. This study demonstrated that while direct information played a strong role in trust-relevant impressions, as it should, indirect information also had a consistent influence on trust impressions, even when it would have been advantageous to ignore it.

As a real estate agent, you must prioritize and strengthen the positive and meaningful indirect impressions that might be formed of you through third parties. More importantly, and particularly in the age of interconnectivity in which we live, think about ways to leverage resources already at your disposal to disseminate knowledge and information about yourself to influence others’ impressions of how trustworthy you are. Some of the most powerful tools to create positive and meaningful indirect impressions about oneself are social media and the internet. What kind of presence do you have on social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube)? What are your clients saying about you online, and what kind of reviews are visible to the public? What reputation might precede you when you sit down with someone for the first time, and what indirect information might follow you after you interact with clients directly? A tangible opportunity to use the findings of this study to your advantage as a real estate agent is to proactively define and refine your image in the public eye through the savvy use of social media and the internet. Ensure that your online presence captures your willingness to serve your clients through previous impressions and experiences that you’ve formed with past clients. Also, keep in mind that word of mouth can influence your clients’ impressions of you, even after you’ve interacted with them in person. Relationships within the community are critical for an agent’s success. Negative gossip can be a highly influential factor for potential buyers who are looking for a trustworthy agent.

**Conclusion**

In order to create meaningful relationships as a real estate agent, one must be aware of the direct and indirect impressions that are being portrayed about oneself. In the midst of the chaos that surrounds the world of real estate, focus on acquiring and disseminating knowledge that you and others can use to form positive impressions that will lead to trustworthiness being built between you and your clients.
Recommended Reading


Reference


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Pareezad Zarolia (PhD – University of Denver) completed her doctorate of Philosophy in Affect, Social, and Cognitive Psychology. She was a graduate research assistant in the Automacity, Affect, Control, and Thought Lab where she was involved in developing a research program that examined how affect and emotion influenced choice behavior. Post-graduation, she joined Google, where she currently works as a User Experience Researcher.

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